



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

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**STUDENT
LIFE**

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Experience**



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Reflection

Concluding my first summer as a Laidlaw Scholar definitely comes with a sense of pride and gratitude, especially as I reflect on how much I have grown both as a researcher and as a person.

My research project, “*Deontic & Legal Concepts in Sanskrit Philosophy*,” was in no way a one-dimensional research pursuit. I was investigating legal concepts across acutely distinct ancient Indian and Western legal contexts, while simultaneously exploring what those historical comparisons might mean for questions surrounding emerging technologies. Candidly, I was trying to conquer several academic disciplines within a six-week period.

That ambition shaped much of my experience this summer. Because this was a project I had developed and was leading myself, I felt a lot of pressure to prove that the topic was worthwhile and that all of its different parts belonged together. I come from an Economics and Public Policy background and had relatively little experience with either philosophy or the computer science side of AI, so there were definitely moments where I felt out of my depth.

At the same time, I never really wanted to narrow the project simply because it would be easier. I have always been interested in international law and global politics, but many of the experiences that have shaped those interests have involved engaging directly with people—whether through supporting local businesses, experiential fieldwork, or interviewing community members to better understand how political and economic systems affect them. Part of what drew me to this research was a similar question of how legal systems decide who is recognized, who is entitled to act, and whose interests are protected. That was what initially led me to compare Medhātithi and Blackstone. But I also kept wondering what came next: if these traditions offered different ways of thinking about authority and legal capacity, what could they contribute to questions that legal systems are confronting now? That was where artificial intelligence entered the project.

What made the project manageable was the community around me. Some of the colleagues I reached out to were very honest in telling me that the project was ambitious, but they were equally generous in helping me unpack it. Their willingness to engage seriously with my questions gave me much more confidence to keep pursuing them, even when I was working outside of my academic comfort zone. The Laidlaw programme itself gave me a similar sense of support. Through the University of Toronto’s Deep Dive programme, where Laidlaw Scholars met weekly in small groups to debrief and reflect with one another, I met regularly with Seemal, Vera, and Donya to talk about our progress, concerns, and whatever else had emerged through the research process. I really valued having a space where none of us had to pretend that everything was going perfectly. Elena and Shraddha were also consistent sources of guidance throughout the summer.

Some of my favourite parts of the experience came from the relationships I formed beyond the research itself. When I visited Dr. Alessandro Giudice in Munich, he went from helping me decode Sanskrit texts and think through conceptual questions to taking me to one of his favourite Sicilian cafés in Munich and inviting me to audit one of the Sanskrit courses he was teaching. Moments like that reminded me that research is not just about producing an argument; it is also built through conversations and relationships.

Looking back, I think one of the most important lessons I learned was that leading an independent project did not mean I had to carry it entirely on my own. I could still take ownership of the work while asking for help, relying on other people's expertise, and admitting when I did not know something. That was a difficult shift for me, but also a valuable one.

I also learned the importance of being proactive and efficient. Reading multiple chapters of *Medhātithi* and *Blackstone* took a great deal of time and energy, and I had to create a realistic schedule that allowed me to accomplish what I needed without cutting corners. Doing all of that within six weeks was not easy whatsoever, but developing those skills was something I found incredibly valuable. I know I will carry them into my next Laidlaw summer, the rest of my university career, and beyond.

Finishing the summer feels significant not only because of what I was able to accomplish academically, but because I remember how intimidating the project felt when I began it. There are still questions I want to answer and parts of the research I want to develop further, but I leave these six weeks much more confident in my ability to pursue questions that initially feel larger than me. More than anything, I am grateful for the people who made that possible.