



Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme
Record of Reflection

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People have a funny way of hearing warnings and deciding that there is no way that could happen to them. For me, I began my summer thinking that there was no way anything could go wrong, and that pivots were not inevitable. I had been interested in antimicrobial resistance (AMR) since I was in middle school, and it was somewhat surreal to be given an opportunity to finally engage and interact with the current academic literature. Finally being given a chance to conduct my own research and contribute to this rapidly changing field of study was exciting, especially with my plan to combine AMR with my other academic interests: policy and gender studies. Before my summer began, my eagerness for the six weeks to begin manifested in the painstaking preparations I made in refining my methodology, conducting preliminary searches, and making the perfect daily research schedule. At that time, I thought any pivots, changes, or departures from my plan would lead to worse output, and that my stubborn optimism and constant preparation would shield me from any issues. Not even the Chinese firewall could stop my research.

Near the start of the first six weeks, I remember having a meeting with my supervisor about my plans for the summer. As we discussed my methodology, I remember being able to see her hesitant skepticism about my plan to comparatively analyze 3-5 selected national action plans (NAPs), using the WHO's 2024 report *Addressing gender inequalities in national action plans on antimicrobial resistance* as a metric for evaluation, even through a grainy Zoom screen. In that moment, however, I was determined to persevere, as determination and resilience will always succeed in the end. It was only when I sat on the website that collected NAPs from around the world, hopelessly clicking out a greyed-out "next" arrow button and yet still hoping more NAPs would emerge, did I finally realize I had to pivot.

A good leader is resilient, does not back down in the face of difficulty, and is capable of establishing clear visions and goals to accomplish. But, perhaps, an even more important leadership skill is to be flexible and comfortable with uncertainty. As I pored over the familiar wording of my proposal, I realized that much of what was familiar - the research question, the objectives, and the core of my methodology - would have to be changed and adapted as the focus on NAPs largely fell out of my research. In that moment where my six-week timer had already

begun but my plans had been fundamentally altered, I was forced to grapple with uncertainty and still persevere.

Part of my leadership identity has always been my organization and planning. Always having at least an idea of what and how I will accomplish my objectives is a core source of my capacity to be resilient and calm in uncertainty. However, with my Laidlaw research, I was at a loss with how to proceed as I had never conducted, designed, or directed my own research project before. I asked my supervisor for guidance on what to do, and she would give me directions to look into. And yet, for weeks on end, I felt frustrated. It felt like I was barely making progress and my lost methodology was never being resolved. As the days counted down, I realized that I had fallen far past my original timeline and was now much more behind than I ever intended to be. In those moments, I realized I had a choice: I could either continue tinkering and feeling dissatisfied with my methodology, or I could simply begin my research in earnest with the parts of my method that had never changed. Finally realizing that I could not perfect my methodology like I had before the summer began (and coming to terms with the fact that it had never been perfect in the first place), I finally started my scoping review.

What surprised me was how relieved, not uncomfortable, I felt. For weeks I thought I needed a plan or else I would not feel secure. But really, I just need to start my work and trust in myself that I could and would figure it out along the way. Since then, I am happy to report that I did find my way, with a slightly shifted methodology that conducts almost all of the original steps (rapid scoping review, thematic qualitative codes, structured analysis through a matrix, proposal of a framework). Rather than focus on NAPs, I directed my focus to the WHO guidance itself, analyzing whether or not its recommendations for policy-makers on how to develop gender-inclusive or gender-responsive AMR interventions were effective in the first place.

Writing this reflection at the end of my summer, I know for a fact that those people who warned me that things would inevitably go wrong and that pivots had to occur may never be able to comprehend just how right they were. Throughout the course of my summer, the usual sources of my resilience, confidence, and meticulous organization were completely undermined by a simple lack of analyzable NAPs. Looking back with hindsight, my methodology had always been

flawed, and the choice to analyze the recommendations likely created more interesting and useful contributions to the literature. Rather than simply compare a couple of nations' approaches to policy, my final research report grapples with what makes good policy guidance if it is aimed at correcting deeply entrenched, socially maintained gendered disparities. I have learned about the skills I rely on to be a good leader, and how to adapt if I suddenly don't have access to a meticulously mapped-out schedule. Ultimately, I have had to realize that the skills that make up a leader are not static. A good leader can be resilient and unflinching in their pursuit of established objectives, but they can also be a bit nervous when the plan falls apart, and they know that they just have to keep moving forward.