



Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme
Record of Reflection

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Date: August 1st 2026

Reflecting on my first summer in the Laidlaw program, I have realized that I have learned so much through this amazing opportunity.

My first key highlight is how much I learned about research. The foundation of my research project is the data analysis project I worked on in the first semester of my previous school year. Even though it was the same research topic, the improvement I have made in the version I wrote for Laidlaw's is incredible. I had never had the chance to read this many articles for my literature review, and it's been so exciting to discover new foundational concepts that I had previously missed. I got the chance to apply what I learned in my research design class from last semester to identify a proper literature gap in the topic. The amount of quantitative work I had to do for my analysis truly solidified so much of the foundational concepts of statistics that I learned in Economics Data Analytics class. I happened to have to take my deferred exam late August, and the difference in my understanding of the concepts because of this project is big. I also got the chance to explore statistical models that are more suited for conflict research that we have not been covered yet in my econometrics classes. Lastly, I also finally took the opportunity to learn LaTeX to properly format my tables which helped make my paper look a lot more professional. The interdisciplinary nature of the topic and methodologies I chose created many challenging roadblocks that I foresaw, and I was not expecting to be able to overcome so many of them. All these things only became possible because the funding from Laidlaws bought me the time to learn and understand the niche intricacies of quantitative analysis in conflict studies.

Second, this experience taught me a lot about what it means to be a researcher. From when I was in sixth grade, I knew I wanted to pursue international relations as my course of study. Through many other experiences and many coffee chats, as someone who loves this field but also loves to teach and mentor, pursuing a career to become a professor became the natural answer. I'm sure we all have dabbled on some form of research before starting this program: whether it's through writing a paper or organizing a group presentation for our class, some of us even had the opportunity of being a research assistant. But I always felt unsatisfied by the work I handed in because of the lack of time I had when being a full-time student. The professors and student alumni I have talked to emphasized that to be a researcher is to work your 9-5 or easily more than that to your academic project. They emphasized that it is often rewarding but also very lonely. I loved the idea of being able to put all my attention to the single project to present the best I can produce to contribute to the knowledge of the world, but I also incredibly feared this warning of loneliness which is why I wanted to challenge myself with an independent project through the Laidlaw program. And now, after this summer, I have never been as certain to want to pursue this as a career. There were definitely many moments when I felt the loneliness people warned me about, especially when my code would still not work after days of fixing. However, the results I ended up with did indeed feel incredibly rewarding and feel like those moments were not just worth it but necessary. It is also my peers in the program who, no matter how different our research fields are, are able to truly empathize when I am struggling and when I am celebrating. Despite it being an independent project, it was because of this research experience that I was able to find so many passionate and driven people who push me to be the best that I can be. Finally, I felt incredibly grateful for my advisor, Professor Chang Peng Kee, who taught me to go beyond my own expectations and was so attentive of mentoring me.

With the amount of improvement this summer has contributed to my character, skills, and knowledge, I am incredibly excited for what the rest of the program has to come.

