

RESL 1500 – Reflective Essay
Jaida Lewis (T00641137)

Upon entering post-secondary, I had a very minimal understanding of what research entailed. In fact, if someone were to bring up the word “research” to me at this point, I would think of the stereotypical chemist’s lab coat, with colourful beakers foaming and frothing and a frantic scientist scrambling across the lab. Five years later, as a fifth-year student soon approaching graduation, the word “research” doesn’t elicit the same visuals or feelings. If I were to take my younger self from the past and show them what I’ve accomplished in these five years, I think the first thought that would come to their mind would be something along the lines of “*you* did all of that?”. I believe one of my most significant take aways from my experience with research is gaining the confidence in my own abilities. I have learned invaluable skills that I will carry forward with me not only in my future academic pursuits, but through life as well. Research happens to be so much more than a white lab coat, and I feel extremely fortunate that I’ve been afforded incredible opportunities and worked alongside some amazing staff at TRU.

I’m grateful to have worked with the Research office at TRU over the past two years, as my experience with non-traditional research methods and community-engaged knowledge mobilization of research has truly broadened by perspective on how impactful research can be. I first began collaborating with the Research office in my role as a Research Innovator in 2022, where we learned about cultural mapping and how the Kamloops community is able to integrate Indigenous practices and align these values with the goals of academic research. The following year I was awarded the Research Ambassador award, where I worked with other fellow ambassadors to organize various events. Our goal was to enrich student access to knowledge of

research opportunities at TRU, particularly first- and second-year students. I participated in events such as UREAP peer support drop-in sessions and a Women in Research speaker series campaign. These programs allowed me to build on interpersonal, communication, and networking skills, and deepened my appreciation for research that goes beyond an academic institution.

My experience with more traditional research has also had a significant impact on my attitude and mindset about research as a whole and has impacted my future career interests tremendously. I have worked with Dr. Claudia Gonzalez at TRU since 2022, where I have completed a Directed Study, a UREAP award project, and will complete my BSc Honours Thesis this coming April. If I would have known all of this would occur after approaching Dr. Gonzalez in March of 2022, I might have hesitated in approaching her, only because I would think I might not be capable of handling the responsibility of all of these opportunities. The notion of “Imposter Syndrome” regarding research (that subconscious thought that you “might not be good enough” or “smart enough”) is a very real experience, and one that I struggled with at the beginning of my research journey. However, Dr. Gonzalez was always there to reassure me as well as provide assistance and feedback whenever I needed it. Up until now, I still experience these feelings temporarily, however I now know what I am capable of and have confidence in my abilities. These research endeavours have pushed me out of my comfort zone and have allowed me to grow into a better student, researcher, and person. From struggling to learn the ins-and-outs of neuroimaging technology, to participant recruitment, data analysis, piloting, battling software issues, and writing up reports, proposals, and reviews – there have been countless times I’ve had to take a step back, determine how I was going to solve a problem, and act accordingly. Sometimes I wasn’t always correct, however my supervisors Dr. Gonzalez and Dr. Rakobowchuk

were always there to help me out. Now that I've been studying the field of cognitive neuroscience over the past two years, I have so many more questions I want to answer and have truly become fascinated. I hope to pursue research after graduation and have applied for the Master's in Clinical Psychology program at various universities. This program integrates research and clinical work, which are both aspects that I would like to incorporate into my professional career. I have always had the innate drive to help others and have always wanted to work in health care, so going into post-secondary I had my mind set on medical school. However, these last two years have profoundly influenced my interests, and I believe the flexibility of being a researcher and clinician would align best with my personal and academic interests.

I believe that if we don't push ourselves, we won't make any progress. Even though it's difficult and there have been times where I don't want to continue, I have been resilient through these situations and pushed forward. Beyond the lab work, and the graphs and figures, and the many pages and references, I think my personal character has developed the most from these experiences. I no longer fear failure (through pure exposure to it), and I am inspired to learn more and continue developing my research skills. To say my time at TRU has been influential would be an understatement, and I am so appreciative of those that have spent time and effort and believed in me along the way.