

## **Ryan Schoonover**

When I originally applied for the Emerging Leader Institute here at UK, my initial reaction was one of amazement. I had been selected for one of UK's most prestigious programs, and I didn't know what to expect. I had heard things from friends that had participated, but I was not aware of the full benefits of participation in ELI until after I had completed it. ELI taught me not only how to be a functional and efficient leader, but also taught me about myself; my strengths and my weaknesses.

On the day of the orientation, I was a little skeptical and unsure of where the next 13 weeks would lead me, and I was wondering why I was standing around the Student Center parking lot at 8:00 on a Saturday morning, my plastic bag of personal possessions next to me. How much work would ELI require of me? How will my leadership skills improve? Would I make it through the course? What do I stand to gain by participating? For me, the answers to these questions soon became clear. I learned immediately upon entering the first class session that leadership begins with the self. After the Meyers-Briggs instrument had been assessed, I discovered my four letters (ENFP), and began to read about them. Little did I know that I was about to undergo a personal revolution. The reading began to expound upon my strengths, weaknesses, and leadership style, to a tee. I was amazed at the amount of information contained within that was right on target. Then, the information began to sink in. "If this test can pinpoint my strengths and weaknesses so well," I thought, "then maybe I can use this test to isolate my weaknesses and improve upon them."

I made a personal goal for myself right then and there. I was going to identify my weaknesses and turn them into strengths, therefore realizing my full leadership potential.

What struck me the most were the words "Has trouble finishing what is started." Printed along side my four letters. Upon reading this, I immediately began to recognize times when I had quit things that I had started, or promised myself that I would start to do something every day, and then ceased to do it after a week or so.

ELI helped me to accomplish this goal through the sessions that were given, as well as through my independent project, the organization of an alcohol prevention program. I learned about conflict management from Dr. Hustedde, and immediately began to apply it to my project. I learned about diversity from Winn Stephens and Darren Bilberry, and began to recognize the need for the input of others, as well as my own input. I about communication (and the lack thereof) from the various experiential games that were played. Thus, I was able to take the experiences that I had garnered from my time in ELI, and apply them to real life situations.

My peer mentor group (directed by Dr. Phyllis Nash) only served to add fuel to the fire, as I now had a dedicated group of people with which to vent my frustrations and celebrate my victories. Through ELI and its many facets, I believe that I have accomplished my goal of finishing what is started, and now I can use the skills taught to me to work on my other weaknesses as well, and use my strengths (including my new ability to finish things), to bring about positive change in my community. If these skills are learned and never used for good, than why learn them in the first place? The biggest lesson I have learned is that one changes by doing, not through good intentions (although those do help sometimes.)

ELI was more than 3 credit hours to me. It was more than the 25 friends that I made along the way. It was even more than our group service project at the Salvation

Army. ELI was the knowledge that every Tuesday and Thursday, when I emerged (no pun intended) from the classroom where the sessions are held, that I would be a better man than when I had entered. ELI has taught me to strive for success and push the limits and boundaries of life. You get out of life what you put into it. Why be a normal student when you can be a leader?