

One semester, just 12 weeks, to a new improved, YOU!

My name is Daniel Turner and I am a sophomore that has just settled on becoming an economics major. I plan on going to law school one day. This makes being involved in school activities and with my community a large priority for me. The Emerging Leader Institute was the experience that I needed to focus my energy and move forward in the right direction. Many individual experiences have made the institute what it was for me, and so I will go into detail on a small sampling of my experiences and what they have meant to me.

Bending the Rules

During each class, guest presenters come to speak on different topics pertaining to leadership. The session about Diversity Issues was extremely beneficial and interesting. Most people would think that we focused mainly on race relations or gender issues, however I was surprised by our activities and what they focused on. We played a trading game, where each person was given a number of chips then allowed to trade those chips with others to try and increase their score. Everyone started with five chips drawn from a paper bag and were then allowed to trade for a short period of time. There were many rules, shifty trading, and a crazy shape/team system that made the game fun. As we entered the third round, the rules went out the window. The diamond group, which was reserved for those players with the highest scores, was allowed to change the rules,

rewrite them anyway they liked. I happened to be lucky enough to be in the diamond group.

By taking part in this trading game, and being part of the elite diamond group, we felt pretty special. Wanting nothing more than to maintain our status, we made all of the rules in complete favor of our group to prevent anyone else from winning. Shortly after we began to trade under the new rules the game fell apart. Suddenly it became clear, I had played into the trap, and the lesson had been learned.

This game wasn't about black and white, male or female, it was about power and money. I was divided between two extremes, the joy of winning and being sure that I would come out on top, and knowing that none of the other groups could feel that, only then to have the system fall apart. I learned that leadership, by those who catch a lucky break, do a good job convincing others, or who take advantage of their friends, can be a dangerous situation. We had changed the rules so much, that the game was totally unfair and no one wanted to play. I had learned my lesson, power is nice and all, but if stretched to far even the strongest rubber band will break.

Explaining what I learned would best be shown in how I applied this lesson to my life and my leadership. Tough questions seemed to pop into my head- had I ever exploited my power to gain more or to insure my own success? Would I have the courage to fight a system where the person or group in charge abused their power? Or would I keep on going, complacent and exploited? I found the answers comforting and scary at the same time. Exploitation certainly isn't and has never been my style, but by being aware that it is possible and that I need to avoid that situation, it never will be. I also seemed to find courage in pledging to myself that when I felt something was wrong,

or shouldn't be done, that I would speak out and fight for change. I am much more critical of my leadership and of the power possessed by others and how they use it. I seemed to learn more about diversity in levels of power and its use than race and gender issues. ELI seemed to do that quite often, surprising me with more experience and knowledge than I had expected.

Be True to your School

This line from the Beach Boys chorus is somewhat appropriate for this section. In our session on Life Management and Leadership we learned to set goals and prioritize our virtues. This was a tough day for me. Personal reflection has not historically been a strong point of mine. In those two hours we reflected almost the entire time. I was asked to write goals, choose which was more important, faithfulness, kindness, or truthfulness, and even construct a mission statement for myself. This, while seeming simple was not an easy task. In the past I had playfully given myself a theme song, but to write a mission statement, put into words what my life stood for and what I was doing with my life as a whole, its not the same as "Being true to your school."

What I learned though, was that by looking at who I was, what I was doing, and why I was doing those things--I could have more fun, accomplish more, and appreciate more what I was doing than ever before. Writing down goals may seem silly, but by doing so I now have more direction, more focus, and I feel truer to my purpose than ever before. By reflecting on what was important to me, I was surprised to find, that many things didn't matter as much to me, or mattered more than what I consciously thought they did. By having to lose virtues you learn to appreciate them.

This has spilled over into my leadership ten fold. Now I am a more excited, more purposeful leader. I set goals in my organizations and I work to see them to fruition. Not only am I working harder, I am working for causes that I believe in. No longer do I try and simply construct a “strong resume with many extracurricular activities,” now I am crafting a document that represents me, what I care about, and what I am committed to.

Kicking “Butts” On My Own

One large component of the Emerging Leader Institute is that of your independent leadership project. I took, literally weeks, to settle on a project and even then, I had my reservations. I wanted to create a change that would have a lasting effect without requiring my lasting involvement. In the end, I was ready to take down smoking in campus housing, kick some real cigarette butts out of my dorm. I wanted UK to make the wise choice, and choose to preserve the buildings that the most important people at the University, the students, use again year after year. Not only was I ready to make changes, I was scared to death of the consequences. What if I succeeded, how would the smokers react? Would I be the target of people’s angry response to what could be seen as an intrusion into their rights? These questions kept a healthy sense of fear in me as my progress moved forward.

I started the project by researching what was going on here in Lexington. I didn’t know whom to start with, who even decides that we can smoke in the dorms? From almost total ignorance I am now working to write a proposal that will end smoking in Campus Housing. Many challenges lie ahead, but I am now more motivated than ever to push this forward and see change made here at UK. The farther along I got in the project

the less and less fear I felt, not only was I working to sell this idea to UK, I was busily selling it to myself.

While my project is still incomplete, I am seeing its influence already in my other activities. I feel more empowered, and capable. Not one thing has changed in UK's smoking policy at this point, but I feel certain it will. I have a confidence now that I didn't have before I began to work. I have learned to trust in myself, and fight for what I feel is right. Big challenges and possible unpopularity don't scare me as much anymore, instead those have been replaced with caution and a skeptical eye for what I advocate and fight for.

In conclusion, the Emerging Leader Institute has changed who I am as a person and how I lead and interact with others. I am more considerate, cautious, and reflective. I was able to meet many people and learn from some of the best at UK. Not only that, but I am able to see their influence in my leadership style and in my thoughts and feelings. ELI was a fun experience that has enriched my life.