

12-8-03

ELI Final Summary

I can remember back on the first day as we all got together on that Saturday morning at the beginning of school. Nobody knew each other, I had no idea what kind of impact and influence this class would have on me. There have been many different experiences throughout the semester, but I'm going to focus on what we did in the Emerging Leader Institute, some things that I have learned from the class itself, and how it has changed me as a result.

The class itself is setup great because of the small amount of people which allows you to get to know everyone on a personal basis. This makes for a more relaxed and comfortable environment. We also had a different speaker every class period which was very fascinating. Every respected speaker had something different to offer. While I didn't particularly like every speaker, I still feel like I took something away from every class period. We had many activities to also go along with the presentations. It's a two hour class so this was good to get some interaction versus putting us to sleep and talking for two straight hours. The activities that really stick out in my mind are Winn and Mimi's and Lance's. Winn and Mimi had a stereotype exercise where we had different groups of people listed on poster board. We were to go around and write down one word to describe the group. This posed for an interesting conversation which followed about how much we actually do stereotype. Lance also had a great exercise when he had us partner up and took us outside. One person had to close their eyes while the other person

had to lead them around, and we were supposed to do this without talking which made for a great challenge. I'll talk more about this activity later and what I learned from it.

We also did a personal service project which we had to organize and coordinate by ourselves. Part of the process was to teach us how to take initiative and be a leader. I had to make contacts and get people to help me volunteer. This was the first time that I wasn't raising my hand to volunteer, but I was instead asking people to raise their hand to help me out. I also had to start from scratch and ask myself what I wanted to do with this project and whom I wanted to help. This question took me to the volunteer fair where I met some great people from the local hospitals and other children care facilities. This is where I got my idea to visit an after school program, the Manchester Center, once a week to hang out and play with the kids.

The other thing we did which proved to be a challenge was the class service project. We went to an assisted living home to throw a Halloween party. I felt like it was very successful, and the class did a lot for the people living there. It was a challenge to the class to get the party organized and ready to run within a few weeks. But people stood up and took charge to ensure it would run smoothly. We had different activities which lasted a few hours. The patrons of the home were tired by the end of the day, but I feel like they genuinely enjoyed our company and the time we spent with them.

I took so many things from this class that it's hard to just sit down and give you a few. We'd be here all night if I told you everything I took away from it. The most important thing I learned or maybe just reaffirmed is the idea that good leaders surround themselves with great people. The only way to be the best is to surround yourself with the best. If the people around you don't care about their craft like you do, then you will

fail. I think this fact became very relevant to me throughout my personal project. I posted signs around campus to get volunteers to help me out. I got a response from two people that seemed really excited about it. The second week into it, I couldn't make it because I had a test that night. Did I have to cancel that week? No, these guys whom I barely knew were excited and wanted to go. They didn't have to go for any reason, but they wanted to and coordinated the ride situation themselves. I knew right then that they would be there to help me out for the semester. If they had not cared, my project definitely wouldn't have been as successful. There were quite a few weeks when I had other commitments, but I believe we had only one no show week during the ten weeks or so that we've been doing it.

Another aspect that I've taken from this class is the idea of writing a mission statement along with the idea of writing out short and long term goals. For me, I don't have a major, and I'm not sure what I want to do with my life. I'm not really worried about it right now. I'm just trying to get a strong foundation under me so I'll be ready when I discover what it is that I have a passion for. I feel like the mission statement is laying that groundwork for me to build on. I have this statement sitting on my desk so that I can constantly remind myself of what it is that I'm striving for. The goals also give me something to shoot for. They're pretty broad right now, but as I become more in depth to what I want, then I will make the goals more detailed.

One last lesson that I learned from the class was the issue of ethics which I thought might've been the most interesting conversation we had in the class. We discussed what is acceptable and what isn't acceptable behavior in certain situations. I really had a good time with these because there is no clear cut answer for these questions,

but rather it is a matter of opinion looked at differently by all people. I also liked when Angel talked to us a little bit about her position and the decisions that she has to make. I liked the question she asked herself before making a decision, “Do I wanted this printed on the front page of the newspaper tomorrow.” This should eliminate any shady decisions that you don’t want people to find out about. After talking about it, I realized that there is no right or wrong answer. Everyone will look at situations differently. Someone will think you handled a situation perfect while the person sitting next to them will think you couldn’t have done any worse. You need do find out for yourself what you deem as acceptable and non-acceptable behavior.

It’s pretty amazing some of the results that I’ve already seen from my experiences in the class. Just a few weeks ago, it hit me with the impact the class had made. My roommates were making jokes about a group of people. Now, typically I would sit there and not participate, but not say anything at the same time either. This time, I spoke up. I told my roommates that I it’s not cool to do that, and if you really have to I don’t want to hear about it. We go into a little discussion or argument about it, but it was cool, and I haven’t heard it as much lately. I believe me speaking up had to with the class that Mimi and Winn did for us. I spoke about it earlier how we wrote down stereotypes for different groups of people. This activity along with the discussion of how our stereotypes lead to judgments about these people helped me to take a stance. Before I was just passive in not participating, but now I was being pro-active and saying something when I didn’t agree with it. I couldn’t have seen that happening just four months ago.

Another thing that will help me in the future is the desire to lead. In the past, I’ve always been more passive, preferring to sit back and just participate versus lead. But this

class has given me the hunger to want to make a difference, and I know that I have the tools to be successful, and know what it takes to successful. Just by doing that small personal project and seeing what a difference it has made for the kids we help, motivates me to do more things like it. Actually, I'm thinking about doing the same thing next semester, but possibly involving more people. I've also seen that you need passion in whatever you do to be successful. People can see when a leader is passionate and they follow that. They are inspired and want to help you versus a leader who just goes through the motions or is a hypocrite.

This class has been an awesome class all year long. I got something out of every single class, every activity, and every person. I've learned so many things in this short time while I'm sure I won't realize many other things I've learned until years down the road. These experiences have been unforgettable and I will carry them with me through the rest of my life.