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18th Emerging Leader Institute

Final Summary

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“So what?”

I remember picking up an ELI Brochure last spring and thinking, “This would look great on my resume.” I had heard people say the program was fun and interesting, but I was just concerned with adding something to this piece of paper that I thought would take me further in life. It didn’t necessarily matter to me then how exciting the program was. All I knew was I was going to do it--I was going to apply to this Emerging Leader Institute and see where it would take me. After all, I’m just one of those people who has to be involved in everything... or at least I *was* one of those people.

I answered a few questions on the back portion of the brochure, then flipped the page over to realize there were a three essay questions. The questions made me ask myself why I wanted to participate in the Institute, why would I make a good participant, and a few other things. Great... I was actually going to have to put effort into this.

As I thought about what I would put down to sell myself to these people on the other end of my application process, I began to think about myself; the leader I wanted to become. I had always wanted to become involved in politics later in my life--after retirement from my real job. It never occurred to me until the beginning of this semester that I wanted politics to actually be my real job. I mean, why should I put off something that I’m so very passionate about? So I sat staring at this brochure, and at my computer’s

blank screen with the cursor flashing after the last letter of my name. My name. That's all I had accomplished in my three essay questions. Application deadline: The very next day. I had to come up with something more profound than just my name if I wanted to be in this program and add another accomplishment to my resume. But what? What could I put in my answers that would separate me from the rest of the applicants--what would make them pick me? I realized then that I had no clue what this "Institute" was even about. So I decided to do some research.

I pulled up the ELI Web site and discovered it hadn't been updated in a few years. This was not the best selling point, but I managed to sift through some quotes and pictures and get down to the real meat of the program. Mindfulness, Creativity and Leadership, Diversity in Leadership, Communication Skills... All of these things were components of ELI. Suddenly I became interested when I saw *Communication Skills*. I remember thinking that this program might make me a better orator--something any good leader needs to become. Exploring the other parts of the web site and reading quotes from ELI Alumni made me wonder if I could really get something out of the program. I finished up my essays and sent the brochure/application back to the acceptance committee, while giving much thought to what the fall 2003 semester might hold for me.

A few weeks later I received an e-mail telling me that I had been accepted into ELI and I began to really get serious about this situation. I had put something in those answers on that application that did make me stand out from the rest. They had let me into their club, so I felt obligated to give it my all. (That's just the way I am.) It was that day, a few weeks before I would leave for summer break, that I opened my heart to the possibilities of ELI as an asset to my personal growth rather than just a high mark on a

piece of paper.

Over the course of that summer I must have visited the ELI web site at least ten times. I had found an interest in the program of which I was going to be a part. Finally... an interest. Also during that summer I began to think about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Up until then I had been premed, my intentions and goals fixed on attaining a medical degree and becoming a plastic surgeon--it had been my dream ever since seeing Mitch Cooper fix a little boy's face after having been burned in a house fire on my favorite TV show, *DALLAS*. Yes, I had interesting tastes in entertainment back then. Nonetheless, I wanted to be a doctor up until that summer. Biology had kicked my tail the semester before, and I knew I couldn't handle those kinds of classes for the rest of my college career. I knew I didn't want to. Then I turned to my passion: politics. I decided then and there that I was going to change my major and turn toward studying political science instead of biology.

With the beginning of a new school year came the start of the Emerging Leader Institute. I spoke to a few of my friends who I knew would be in the class with me, and they shared my newly-discovered enthusiasm. I knew this semester was going to be different because I was excited about the many opportunities that were waiting for me. I was going to be studying something that actually interested me, and I was going to be participating in challenging and exciting programs and activities that would shape the leader I hope to one day become. Then the dreaded e-mail came, and that excitement subsided.

That e-mail stated that we--the next generation of ELI Participants--had to attend an orientation session that lasted all day! A six-hour get-to-know-you period filled with

ice-breaking activities and detailed introductions of the 20-some people I'd share the next semester with. I was definitely not excited about having to be somewhere at 9 AM on a Saturday morning. After all, what college student would be?!

But when that fateful Saturday morning rolled around, I apprehensively and anxiously met the people who would become some of my best friends since coming to UK. I met the future leaders of this University, of Lexington, of Kentucky, and of America. I met people that day who possessed more talent and leadership skills than I ever could have imagined. I also learned a lot about myself that day, and I learned that I had a lot of room to grow as a leader.

In the next few days, the actual Institute began and the presenters and group facilitators came in and out of the classroom, hoping to leave their mark on these future leaders of our world. I enjoyed all of the different workshops and exercises, but a few of them stood out from the others. The most influential part and my personal favorite workshop of the program was the Ethics in Leadership section facilitated by Dr. Jeff Dembo. Dr. Dembo began the period by bringing out class into a smaller, more intimate circle--something that had never been done before. Almost immediately, Dr. Dembo had my attention and kept it throughout the two-hour period. After being brought closer to my classmates, each one looking particularly attentive, I found myself listening to the extensive credentials of the man leading the discussion. An oral and maxillo-facial surgeon, member of the dental school faculty, an academic ombud, chair of the University Senate. Obviously this was a man who knew a lot about leadership--a true leader if ever there was one. But perhaps what struck me most was his voice and the way he communicated with our class. He discussed, at length, the types of moral dilemmas

we as leaders might someday find ourselves caught in. He alluded to special references from his own experience as a leader in many different aspects of his life. Dembo then made us think about factors that would influence our judgment. He used the scenario of us running a red light. Would we do it if there was no one around? If no one would ever find out about us speeding through that red light, and no potential for an accident existed, would we break this crucial rule of stopping on red? I watched and listened as many of my classmates offered their feedback. Many shared what they would do if put in that instance, and immediately began to justify or excuse their behavior. It was definitely interesting for me to hear what others would do if placed in that particular situation and for me to consider whether I myself would brake or slip through unnoticed. Later in the period, Dembo proposed some helpful strategies to help us make an ethical decision, strategies that have stuck with me. He told us to wonder, “what if my mom would find out?” or “What if this made newspaper headlines?” Then and only then should an ethical decision be made.

I definitely walked away from that class with a lot of thoughts in my head. My ethics and morals have always been an important part of my life, the part that I often battle with when making any major decision. I’ve always tried to do the right thing, but sometimes the lines have been blurred for me. After sitting through this lecture by Dr. Dembo, I had much to think about. I learned that I would sometimes do things differently if I knew my mom would find out, and I never wanted some of the things I had done to appear in any newspaper--headlines or comics. I realized then and there that being a leader means you have to make some tough decisions, but you also have to set an example. An example that others will want to follow. And this always means making an

ethical decision.

I think what I learned during Dr. Dembo's session with our 18th Emerging Leader Institute class will be with me throughout my life. Every time I make a decision, whether it's stopping for a red light at night when no one else is in sight, or whether I see the guy next to me cheating in History class. When it comes time for me to seek public office, I want to be able to assert that my moral status is very strong and steadfast.

I've learned so much and grown a great deal since I first filled out that ELI Application last spring. I never imagined then the connections I'd make with the people in the class or the connections I'd make with myself. The program has touched all parts of my life. I've laughed, cried and done everything in between since that much-dreaded Saturday orientation class. But all in all, I can honestly say I would not have missed this experience for the world! Thanks to everyone who has had a hand in making me grow as both a person and a leader. I know that when you look at our class picture 20 years from now, you will see some very important people. You'll see 23 people who are already very important to me. It was an awesome ride!