

ELI-Fall 2003  
Final Paper

This has undoubtedly been an extraordinary semester for me as a student because ELI has been unlike any other class I've ever taken. Rather than memorizing math equations or historical facts, through ELI I've learned about myself, as well as many valuable life lessons which I will carry with me long after this semester and even after my college years. I decided to apply to the program not because I saw myself as a leader, but rather because I wanted to develop my skills and hone my strengths so that I might become one. I know we've all heard that leaders are born, not made but I would disagree with that statement. I believe that leaders develop not only through life's triumphs but also in its struggles, because I think only leaders can emerge after hardship and become stronger as a result. ELI has been fun, but also a challenge for me because I've had to dig deep within myself, but I think I can now say that I am a leader. The institute has truly had a life-changing effect upon me and how I view my mission in life. I now believe that I have a higher purpose, I want to make the world a better place in some way, and bring about change for the betterment of others. Each class session we had was like a stepping stone in developing as leaders and gaining new skills, and now that the class has ended I feel like we have all crossed a threshold into bright, promising futures.

First, I am going to talk about the class that was the most influential upon me. Rhonda's lecture, "Type and Leadership" was probably the most enlightening because it gave me insight into my personality type and its implications. I learned that I am a 1-C personality type. The "I" aspect of my personality signifies influence, therefore I tell them to relax and pace themselves, and a helpful axiom to achieve this is, "You win some, you lose some." The test we took to identify our personality type was completely accurate in my case, and it has been very helpful to have an "outside" perspective into identifying the character strengths and weaknesses that I possess. With this knowledge I can be a more effective leader by being aware of my tendencies, and work to change my character flaws into assets.

Also in Rhonda's session we wrote a mission statement and our goals for life. It was really helpful to actually take some time and think about what I want for myself in life, and to write it all down. My mission statement is: "To lead a successful, happy, and adventurous life surrounded by my family and friends." This statement really defines for me, what I find of up most importance in life. Also during this session we talked about what we would like to accomplish by the time we died, and how we would want to be remembered. I still have the sheet that I wrote all of my aspirations down on hanging in my room for me to see and remind myself of each day. I wrote on it that by the time I die I want to be happily married with children, have traveled around the world and been immersed in many cultures, graduated from college, work for the Peace Corps, live in Austin, Texas, speak five languages, and maintain lifelong friendships. All of these things are fairly simple and basic, but I think I now have a better understanding of what makes me happy, and what I want to accomplish in my lifetime.

With all of this in mind, which I learned about myself early on in the semester, it made my decision in choosing my service project easier. I realized that I want to live my life with a higher purpose, in such a way that I benefit and help others. This is the basic premise I designed my community service project around. Ultimately, I decided to organize a clothing drive to benefit the homeless and impoverished people in Lexington, through the Catholic Action Center. I decided to make it a "Greek affair" and implement the project in my sorority house, and in the Kappa Sigma fraternity house. I allowed a month's time for collection. By the end of the month I collected two big cardboard boxes

full of clothing, ranging from shoes and pants, to gloves and coats. Also what I found was that as more and more people found out about what I was doing, the more support I got and my project really snowballed as a result. In my home alone we gathered three large containers of clothing, with at least 5 warm coats, and several pairs of shoes. Although I would have liked for my project to have been more hands on, the gratitude and appreciation I received from the recipients of the clothing drive was entirely rewarding itself. My eyes have been opened to a serious problem which exists in this very community. Before doing my community service project, I had no idea about the scope of homelessness and poverty which pervades in the city I've grown up in for 13 years. I want to continue working to help the homeless in our community through my church's various outreach programs, and perhaps even organize a campus-wide clothing drive in the future.

In conclusion, I really feel blessed to have been chosen to participate in this wonderful program. I believe the Emerging Leader Institute has most definitely had a positive and motivational impact upon my life. I now see the world with more open eyes, my perspective has been broadened, I've been exposed to diverse opinions, but most importantly I can see the potential within myself to make an impact in this world. For me, the institute has been a series of stepping stones, a learning process which has led to a life-altering transformation within myself.

Thanks for everything!

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